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ABSTRACT

The mutual efforts of committees of the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), the Washington Association of School Business Officials (WASBO), and the state's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to reduce, control, and manage the flow of paperwork to and from local school districts are reported here. In the first year of this effort the number of forms required was reduced by over one third. A formal process for coordinating the information requests of different offices was instituted. Problem areas in specific forms were analyzed, and agencies inside and outside OSPI requiring high amounts of paperwork were identified. Of particular interest was the fact that local districts created as much paperwork as did the state level agencies. The author, chairman of the WASA committee, concludes with a discussion of successes in paperwork control in his own district and with a presentation of an outline of OSPI's recommendations for local district paperwork management. (Author/PGD)

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AASA

A MODEL PROGRAM TO REDUCE PAPERWORK AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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Ever get fed up to here -- with forms to fill out, information to collect or just other kinds of paperwork?? (show transparency #1) That's just the way I felt one October day in 1978. October is the big month for reporting statistics to our State Department of Instruction, and I had just finished signing a stack of reports on just about everything when my incoming mail contained another request for information about our gifted program. I said to myself - I just signed something almost like this. I checked back and I had, only the new request was from the Department Director of State Gifted Programs whereas the first report went directly to the Finance Department with the attendance figures.

It just happened the next day, a regional meeting of our Washington Association of School Administrators was held and one of the topics was "Resolutions for Fall Conference." I brought my topic of duplicative reports up for discussion, and I was surprised by my colleagues unanimous support for a resolution calling the State Department of Instruction to reduce paperwork. (show transparency #2) The State Association passed the resolution also and it was not long before I received a call asking if I would chair a committee appointed by Buster Brouillet, our State Superintendent of Public Instruction. I said "yes" because I had had some input to a similar committee while I was located in Arizona.

I'd like to share with you the results of that Committee because it had a direct impact on my topic today. Also, if your State has not yet had such a committee or task force, then I strongly suggest one be started.

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Subsequently, a five-member committee was established and has met regularly since March 21, 1979. In March of 1980, the committee began meeting jointly with the WASBO Paperwork Management Committee and together we have had regular contact with OSPI support staff. Frequent meetings with many OSPI staff associated with information and data collection activities have also been held.

The committee's goals and objectives were established to include:

- (1) To develop a systematic approach to review all the forms being used by the State Department of Public Instruction;
- (2) To review the appropriateness of the data being requested;
- (3) To examine the amount of duplication of reports required by OSPI;
- (4) To develop a management system for data collection and for forms control.

Transparency #3

At the time of the committee's formation, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction was simultaneously initiating extensive efforts to reduce, control and manage the paperwork flow to and from local districts. Thus began a cooperative effort between the WASA Committee and OSPI which has produced some notable accomplishments and has produced some recommendations for future involvement.

The Committee and OSPI staff spent considerable time going over the forms in use at that time. The analysis of the forms was completed in a number of ways which included the use of a "Hassle Factor Sheet" developed at OSPI. As the result, OSPI's annual data collection schedule was reorganized for 1980-81 and condensed from twenty-two pages in 1979-80 to six pages. The three hundred fifty-seven (357) forms required by the 1980-81 schedule was reduced downward to the two hundred twenty-three (223) forms - a reduction of 134 forms!

That was the first giant step and perhaps the easiest. Next, the Committee decided to analyze the remaining forms and seek to improve those and then to analyze the procedures used to collect the data.

The form improvement program first identified problem forms. Once found, problem forms were subjected to analysis and redesign. When possible, forms were eliminated by providing required data from alternative sources. In lieu of conventional data collection forms, the use of computer generated reports (i.e. turnaround documents) containing data for districts to update frequently diminished the paperwork burden.

To help identify problem forms, the "Hassle Factor Measurement" process was used. As completed, it provides for qualitative and quantitative measurement of individual data collection forms; i.e., the higher the hassle factor, the greater the hassle. (show transparency #4) The Hassle Factor Measurement Process was applied to all forms in nine OSPI form categories.

The ten forms with the poorest rating were then identified and OSPI staff developed an action plan to correct each form.

The Committee also identified those Departments within OSPI which seemed to collect the most data and which caused more comments on the forms survey. The leading three - Special Education, Vocational Education and Transportation - have all been subjected to a complete analysis of information requested, compatibility with Federal data requests and a check to see if the information is already on file in some other department. The Vocational Education did a quick job and people in the field saw quickly the results of the Committee's efforts. Special Education has been difficult due to the lack of congruency of state and federal laws.

While all this was going on, OSPI developed an internal forms control office which has significantly influenced the quality, content and quantity of new forms being generated at the State level. All information requirements, even those of a questionnaire nature, has to go through a process which acts to sensitize the sender to the paperwork burden imposed by the educational system.

One general repetitive statement occurred many times in defense of paperwork and that was: "We need it for a papertrail to satisfy the Auditor." To help our Committee on this front, the State Auditor agreed to allow one of his Division heads to serve on the Committee. He has been quite helpful to our Committee.

Throughout our analysis of forms, it became quite evident to the Committee that not all of the paperwork problem resided at the State level. Three other agencies were also sources of trouble.

One was the State Legislature. The Committee was instrumental in having a bill introduced which called for a "Paperwork Impact" statement for every new piece of legislation as it is introduced for consideration. Unfortunately, the bill was not passed but a significant amount of discussion and awareness was caused by it.

The State Board of Education was the second agency and a letter was written to alert them to several of the problems caused by their actions.

The third agency is the reason for this session today. The Committee found that the local districts were just as notorious in creating paperwork as was the State. During 1981, a major objective of the Committee was to produce a procedure local districts could use to examine their data collection system. I had a personal interest in this project since I did some work on this topic in my own District during the Spring of 1979. Let me just spend a few minutes describing that experience.

I called together representatives from the groups within our District who seemed to be the biggest preparers of data. For example, there were secretaries from the elementary and secondary schools, teachers from the regular classrooms, Special Education and Special Projects which included our data processing system, the head accountant, the secretaries to the nurse and transportation director, my secretary and myself.

At our first meeting, a lot of frustration was vented and many ideas surfaced. An action plan was developed and over a period of three months, six (6) additional meetings were held, each having one or two specific action topics.

For example, at our second meeting the student information form was examined and suggestions were made to the supervisor for improvement. The revised form was examined at a later meeting and approved. Two attendance reporting forms were combined into one, two medication permission forms were combined and simplified. It was also noted during these first two meetings that there was no consistency on how local schools collected and stored required information. We found that some schools were collecting and storing two sets of student cumulative records - one done by hand and the other from computer printouts. That newfangled machine was not to be trusted!

We also discovered a need to hold a secretaries workshop to discuss the best ways to prepare forms needed by the District. I attended this and found that much more duplication of effort was taking place and short cuts used by some secretaries would be helpful to all. Two such meetings were held and I received several notes from secretaries indicating their appreciation.

The forms problem at the Senior High School level warranted a separate committee at that level.

One meeting was devoted to Special Education. Dr. Dolores DeMier, Director, reported on changes suggested by her staff. Three separate IEP forms were eliminated, two other forms were combined and a revised computer enrollment form consolidated pieces of information that frequently needed to be recalled for reports.

Many other good things happened too, as the Committee looked into the Personnel and Business Services departments.

Now back to the State Committee's procedure for local districts to use to combat their paperwork problems. Ron Hamblein, OSPI, coordinated the efforts of the sub-committee and eventually this pamphlet was produced. Let me take you through the outline contained therein.

I. District Superintendent's Responsibility

- A. To manage a review of the district's paperwork problem.
- B. To appoint a Paperwork Committee to direct the Paperwork Improvement Program.
- C. To assign staff support to the Paperwork Committee sufficient to accomplish the task.
- D. To involve district personnel who have the responsibility for providing data and completing forms. (Remember to include secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, etc.)
- E. To meet frequently (e.g., weekly) with committee and staff to motivate and direct.

II. Paperwork Committee Assessment Duties

- A. Determine existing forms management policy, i.e.:
 - 1. Who develops forms
 - 2. Who fills out forms
 - 3. Who determines the need for forms
 - 4. Who collects data
 - 5. Who determines data validity
- B. Identify forms that are a "hassle."
 - 1. Query district personnel with Hassle Factor Worksheet
 - 2. Solicit estimates of labor hours required
 - 3. Analyze input from district personnel
 - 4. Develop prioritized list
- C. Analyze "Hassle" forms.
 - 1. Complete Form Analysis Worksheet
 - 2. Calculate estimated labor hours per form
 - 3. Calculate total labor hours

III. Paperwork Committee's Improvement Process

- A. Select form(s) for detailed analysis
- B. Develop ranked forms list with greatest "hassle" forms first and the least onerous forms last.
- C. Collect justification data.
 - 1. Legal citations
 - a. Federal statute
 - b. Code of Federal Regulations
 - c. State statute (RCW)
 - d. Rules and regulations (WAC)
 - e. District policy
 - f. Contractual agreements
 - 2. Administrative interpretation
 - a. Directives, memos, and bulletins
 - b. Monitor
 - c. Auditor reports
 - d. Program personnel position statements
- D. Analyze justification data and categories as:
 - 1. None
 - 2. Inadequate
 - 3. Adequate
 - 4. Abundant
- E. Identify data users and solicit user input including data cells used.
- F. Collect relevant information.
- G. Develop recommendations to committee.

IV. District superintendent meets with committee and staff to review and act upon recommendations

V. District superintendent organizes a permanent forms control program so that the problem does not recur

Sound laborious??? It is and it isn't. It is important to take your time and involve the people who initiate or use the data. Most important, let me reiterate, the Superintendent, or in a large district, the chief deputy, must meet frequently with the Committee to see that Division Directors do not intimidate other staff members and to ask that age old question "why."

Does this process do any good? This fall I sent out the paperwork assessment forms to randomly selected staff members in our District to check our Districts status. I was surprised, but pleased, that no statement received more than a 29 rating and most were in the acceptable range. Under "comments" there were some new ideas expressed so I have re-established our local committee to follow through on these suggestions. This committee will also function as the District forms control committee.

I hope you found this information helpful. Reducing paperwork is a tedious task, not much glory in it, but your commitment will let every staff member know that you care about what they do and the time they spend doing it.